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DE RUEHAM #1264/01 1551515
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FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5227
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0356
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0071

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001264

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NEA/ELA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN: JOURNALISTS BOTH PRAISE AND CRITIQUE CAIRO
SPEECH

REF: SECSTATE 55334

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Ten of Jordan's leading journalists joined the Ambassador for a luncheon to view and discuss the President's speech in Cairo. All responded favorably to the overall substance and tone of the speech. This group also focused in great detail on the language used to deny the legitimacy of continuing Israeli settlements and expressed concern that a concrete action plan for peace was not announced. They also felt more or "equal" attention should have been paid to the plight of the Palestinians. Admitting that Jordanians were most concerned with regional conflicts and security issues, they did not think language on human rights and religious freedom would have a major impact on the street. At the end, all guests agreed that the message would increase a sense of optimism amongst Muslims in Jordan. End Summary.

Winning Hearts and Minds

¶2. (SBU) The journalists praised the content of President Obama's speech, as well as his delivery and tone. They predict his personal prestige in the region will rise as a result. "He brings a new spirit, energy, and warmth to the U.S./Muslim dialogue." They also appreciated his thoughtful and appropriate references to the Koran throughout the speech.

We Care About Israel and Palestine....

¶3. (SBU) There was detailed discussion of the language on Israel and Palestine. One guest commented, "There will be a comparison -- down to syllabic calculations -- about how much attention was paid to the plight of the Israelis vs. the plight of the Palestinians." The group's perception was that Israel's plight had received more attention. They carefully parsed the President's words on continuing settlements and appreciated his "clarity of language."

¶4. (SBU) There was a distinction about "new language." While they agreed that the speech represented a new tone from the Oval Office, they did not find new messaging on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. "We've studied President Obama's speeches from the campaign and there is nothing new here." They were disappointed not to hear a more detailed list of concrete actions to further peace negotiations.

...But Less About Reform Issues

¶5. (SBU) We were told that the primary focus of the speech

for Jordanian would not be the sections dealing with human rights and reform. "We care more about the impact of security and economics in our daily lives than these issues."

One guest was particular vocal in his disappointment in the President's travel to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, saying those countries which do not respect human rights should not be "rewarded" by a visit from the President or praise for their leaders.

Bottom Line - Speech Was a Success

¶6. (SBU) The groups agreed that expectations were extremely high before the speech and that the President "passed the test." When asked to predict how the Jordanian public would respond, they told us that there would be an increase in optimism and confidence in President Obama.

Participants

¶7. (U) The following journalists attended the lunch:

Dr. Fahed Al- Fanek, Chairman of the Board, Jordan Press Foundation

Oraib Al-Rantawi, Columnist, Ad-Dustour

Nabil Ghisan, Senior Editor, Al Arab Al-Yawn

Jamil Al Nimri, Columnist, Al Ghad

Sameeh Al Ma'aytah, Columnist, Al Ghad

Samir Barhous, Chief Editor, Jordan Times

Daoud Kuttub, Radio Al-Balad

Rana Sabbagh, Jordan Times

AMMAN 00001264 002 OF 002

Dr. Hassan Barari, Columnist, Al-Rai

Basil Okoor, Editor, AmmanNews.Net (Note: The Ambassador held an on-line webchat with this group after the speech. End Note.)

Beecroft